

# PEACE BUILDING THROUGH EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

## A Guidance Note

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary.....	2
Definitions .....	4
Concept & Introduction.....	5
I. How does ECD contribute to peace building?.....	8
II. Two suggested approaches to peace building in the early years .....	10
III. How can ECD be integrated INTO peace-building programmes? .....	14
Appendix: outcomes & activities for ECD & Peace-building Programmes.....	20

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper was drafted by Vidur Chopra. Review and revisions were provided by Pia Rebello Britto, Vijaya Singh, Aster Haregot and Eva Lotta Schiermeyer. Anna Zonderman provided editorial assistance, the figures were created by Adrian Cerezo, and the layout was done by Cynthia Spence.



Two-month-old Faridatou smiles up at her grandmother, Kongo Zeta, who is rubbing shea butter on the baby's skin after giving her a bath, inside their home in the village of Weotenga, Burkina Faso.



(Right) Niyati Burman holds her three-year-old son Raju while counselling a young mother and her family at their home in Dinajpur District in West Bengal State.

## SUMMARY:

### How can ECD contribute to peace building?

- Early childhood development (ECD) is a critical period of development that extends from the prenatal period through 8 years of age. Children as young as 2 years old can demonstrate stigma. Thus, attempts to change violent and discriminatory attitudes need to begin as young as possible. The early years provide a window of opportunity for shaping behaviours and attitudes.
- Among communities, ECD programs can help create a shared vision for the future that focuses on children. It allows for collaboration, deliberation and the development of social networks across different groups, thereby promoting social cohesion.

- In addition to supporting young children, ECD programs support caregivers as well—addressing their capacities and skills to support young children's development. Leaving caregivers out of the equation can result in psychosocial distress, isolation, and marginalization, which are all drivers of violence (for a full description of the types and drivers of violence, see Table 1).
- There is strong evidence that the long-term returns to investing in ECD are high. Quality early childhood environments enable young children to be better prepared for school and the labor market, thereby providing more equitable access to resources to previously marginalized groups. Inequality is a key driver of conflict. However, through their long term accruing benefits, ECD programs can decrease the potential for future conflict.

## DEFINITIONS

- **Early childhood development** refers to the process through which a young child under 8 years of age develops optimal physical health, mental alertness, emotional confidence, social competence and readiness to learn. Development in each of these domains is inter-related and inter-dependent such that development in one domain cannot be prioritized over any other. A critical component of the process is context. Development in early childhood results from interactions between the child and the environment. From an ecological perspective, a host of factors influence early development—from the most proximal (e.g., family) to the more distal contexts (e.g., national and international policies).
- **Peace building** refers to the processes associated with reducing direct and indirect violence. Direct violence refers to physical or psychological harm caused by individuals. Indirect violence refers to systematic social injustices, oppression and discrimination through existing legal, political, cultural, social and economic structures. However, peace is not just the absence of violence. It is also the active promotion of harmony with an emphasis on the development of an effective infrastructure to sustain social justice, healthcare and economic development.
- **Stimulation** refers to the critical and mutually rewarding physical, emotional and verbal exchanges between the child and primary caregiver that advance neural connections in the brain.
- **Caregivers** are the adults who care for the young child. Parents; extended family members; paid and unpaid community volunteers who look after children when parents are otherwise engaged; and those looking after children in community-based care centers and crèches, are all caregivers.
- **Equitable approaches** refer to the strategies that address the root causes of inequity, specifically for those most marginalized and vulnerable. Conflicts and violence put young children particularly at risk. An equitable approach in early childhood is designed with the barriers for young children to reach their fullest potentials in mind. Such barriers may be particularly complex for sub-populations that are stigmatized, discriminated against, marginalized and otherwise vulnerable.

## CONCEPT & INTRODUCTION

### Overview

According to the Global Peace Index,<sup>i</sup> the world has experienced an overall decline in peacefulness over the past six years—much of which can be attributed to increases in strife, instability and internal conflict within individual countries.<sup>1</sup>

In any conflict, young children are particularly vulnerable. A multitude of factors common in these settings have a negative impact on young children, including loss of caregivers; increased risk of malnutrition, physical maiming, and psychosocial threats; and lack of opportunities for early learning and stimulation. In 2011, children in conflict-affected, low-income countries were two times more likely to die before the age of 5 than were children in other low-income countries.<sup>2</sup> In addition, approximately thirteen per cent of refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced persons were children under 5 (a conservative estimate, owing to the paucity of reliable data on this sub-population).<sup>3</sup> Conflict, thus, has a debilitating impact on young children's wellbeing. The question that arises is:

*what preventive factors can serve as safeguards in meeting the needs and upholding the rights of young children in times of conflict?*

A simple approach may be to promote negative peace, the cessation of conflict and violence.<sup>4</sup> There is reason to believe that conventional understandings of conflict and violence need expansion and can no longer be limited to or understood as inter-state warfare. Both the 2011 World Development Report

<sup>i</sup> The Global Peace Index ranks the peacefulness of nations through an analysis of twenty-two qualitative and quantitative indicators across 162 countries

and the 2012 Human Security Report establish the multi-faceted nature of “modern violence”—organized crime in the form of gangs; trafficking of drugs, people and commodities; and political and ideological violence. Given the many dimensions of violence and conflict, their drivers are multifarious as well.

A combination of poverty, economic and gender inequality, and a lack of strong governance are recognized as factors often associated with the onset of conflict.<sup>5,6</sup> For this reason, any effort to promote peace must not only encompass the absence of violence but also account for its structural drivers. “Violence that is built into structures and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances.”<sup>7</sup> In adopting this approach, building and sustaining peace extends beyond peace treaties and accords between nations, to the preservation of justice, harmony and trust among individuals—a role that can be taken on by communities, educators and families.

### Rationale for including early childhood development in peace building

Early childhood development (ECD) refers to the process through which a young child under 8 years of age develops optimal physical health, mental alertness, emotional confidence, social competence and readiness to learn.<sup>8</sup> Research indicates that the nature and quality of ECD is one of the strongest predictors of later human development.<sup>9</sup> This period of time is one of the most sensitive in the development of individuals and is characterized by rapid changes in the architecture of the brain. Mounting evidence from the fields of neurobiology, economics and developmental psychology points to ECD programmes



Mohammed, 6, plays with his elder sister, Muna Salah al-Ashqar, 17, in their home in Beit Lahia, a city in northern Gaza. During the recent military incursion, Muna's family evacuated to a shelter.

as promising approaches to alleviating poverty and mitigating socioeconomic inequities.<sup>10</sup>

If discrimination, systematic oppression, inequity in opportunity, multi-generational poverty and other structural drivers of violence are to be overcome, ECD has a key role to play. ECD lays the foundation for positive behaviour traits, such as learning to appreciate diversity and inclusiveness, working cooperatively, managing conflicts and disputes in healthy and peaceful ways, and learning to share with and care for others. These traits are critical to the success of any meaningful attempt toward peace building in later years. In this way, the early years provide an

unparalleled window of opportunity, as they are an ideal time to facilitate positive interactions and to promote holistic development.

Although generations of ethnic tensions and strife cannot be erased overnight, few would disagree that the creation of stable, nurturing and stimulating environments for young children is critical not only in their own communities, but across ethnic groups and countries as well. Therefore, identifying multiple pathways to shape a just and equal society—specifically, one that upholds the rights of young children at its very core—serves as a unique call to action to previously divided communities. In short, ECD provides a unique, powerful and promising entry point for communities and individuals for “transcending existing divides and refocusing attention and priorities on their own children and their future.”<sup>11</sup>

### What is the purpose of this guidance note?

This guidance note on ECD and peace building seeks to:

- **Establish** a clear rationale for the crucial role of ECD in peace building;
- **Advocate** for prioritizing ECD in peace building programmes to ensure that such efforts leverage the critical window of opportunity that is the early years; and
- **Provide** programme managers with a framework for designing effective peace-building programmes for young children and their families.

### Who is this guidance note for?

The guidance note is for practitioners and policy makers working in conflict-affected, fragile, and post-conflict settings who are interested in extending peace building to the early years. It is written to provide readers with a brief overview of ECD and its potential to enhance peace-building initiatives.

For individuals with a strong background in ECD, this note also offers suggestions and possible entry points for making peace building an explicit goal of existing ECD programmes.

**T**he early years lay the foundation for the development of skills such as cooperation, peaceful negotiation of conflicts, regulation of impulsive behaviour, and application of logic to novel situations. Thus, this is a critical period for the ultimate development of harmonious, peaceful and just societies. In this regard, this guidance note also targets programme managers in countries that have not experienced violent conflict and instability directly—but could be at risk for such events in the future—who are seeking to understand the potential for ECD to provide approaches for peace building if such circumstances arise.

### When should this guidance note be used?

The guidance note can be used before, during or after a conflict, or when a fragile situation could erupt into conflict. Given the fundamental way in which inclusion of young children and their families can enhance peace-building initiatives, peace building in the early years can occur at any point and in any context. In addition, the approaches presented in the guidance note deliberately cut across specific time dimensions, based on the premise that peace

*ECD lays the foundation for positive behaviour traits, such as learning to appreciate diversity and inclusiveness, working cooperatively, managing conflicts and disputes in healthy and peaceful ways.*

building in the early years requires sustained and targeted interventions.

### How is this guidance note organized?

- **Section I:** In the first section, we explain the different theories of change related to peace building in the early years.
- **Section II:** In the second section, we lay out two suggested approaches to peace building in the early years. The guidance note specifically demonstrates how a lack of attention to ECD can perpetuate the cycles of violence and conflict.
- **Section III:** In the third section, we suggest different activities that can be integrated into ECD programmes to promote peace building. We also address the underlying mechanisms through which ECD can disrupt the cycles of violence and conflict.
- **Appendix:** Based on UNICEF's Peace Building, Education and Advocacy Programme proposal, as funded by the government of the Netherlands, as well as the INEE Guidance Notes on Conflict Sensitive Education, we extend and adapt the suggested outputs and activities to focus specifically on the needs of the youngest children.

### What is included in this guidance note?

This guidance note includes suggested approaches and activities that promote peace building in the early years. It is not meant to be prescriptive nor should it be used as a programmatic action guide. Rather, the note provides a way to understand the benefits of peace-building initiatives that start early in the life cycle, and illustrates different entry points and approaches that can be adopted for this purpose. More detailed activities for trainers, caregivers, facilitators and parents will be included in UNICEF's updated ECD in Emergencies Training Pack.<sup>ii</sup>

ii An updated version of the ECD in Emergencies Training Pack is forthcoming, and will be made available on UNICEF's website and Intranet

## I. How Does ECD Contribute to Peace Building?

This section articulates the links between ECD and peace building, and the underlying theories of change that form the foundational premises for this guidance note.

### Human Development Change Theory

This theory proposes that transformative societal changes in attitudes, behaviours and skills can occur if the seeds of sustainable peace are sown from the very early stages of the life cycle. Science has established that the quality of early experiences has an impact on foundational skill acquisition and brain circuitry, which, in turn, are associated with optimal processing of complex information and with behaviours that demonstrate social competence and emotional stability.<sup>12</sup> Research shows that the foundations of healthy social interactions—empathy, compassion, acceptance, friendliness and perspective-taking abilities—and the ability to regulate emotions, manage and use information logically, and inhibit impulsive behaviours in the context of novel situations, are developed in the very early years. We argue that these skills are at the very core of peace building. Thus, any attempt to transform divisive mindsets and violent, impulsive actions must start with young children.

### Psychological and Emotional Change Theory

This theory asserts that in attending to the emotional needs of children and their caregivers, the psychosocial causes of conflict and violence—such as stress, insecurity, and victimization—can also be addressed. Young children develop in an environment of relationships. Research indicates that young children’s exposure to severe, frequent or prolonged adversity, in the absence of nurturing and responsive caregiving, can result in the extended activation

of the body’s stress response system. This not only disrupts brain development, but also triggers high anxiety levels. Consequently, the ability to learn and interact socially with others is impaired, resulting in the perception that the world is a threatening place.<sup>13</sup> Research has also established that for caregivers who are depressed, stressed, or feeling isolated, early stimulation and parenting programmes that encourage caregivers to engage in “serve and return” interactions—through play, baby-talk, caressing touches, etc.—can directly improve the caregiver’s mood and enhance wellbeing.<sup>14</sup> Simply put, when caregivers feel more connected to, responsible for, and invested in the development of their young children, they are less likely to channel their energy into socially destabilizing activities and, in turn, are more able to do what is best for their children.

### Root Cause and Justice Theory

This theory suggests that violence is a result of social and economic inequities, systematic oppressions, and injustice. If these factors—the structural drivers of violence—are addressed, then more equitable, harmonious, peaceful and socially just societies can develop. There is mounting evidence regarding the positive, long-term benefits of ECD interventions for such purposes. By promoting opportunities for early learning, and, thus, acquisition of human capital, ECD interventions have demonstrated a long-term impact on overall academic achievement, grade retention, and school graduation, and, in turn, better labor market outcomes.<sup>9</sup> In addition, ECD programmes that target families also spark social change in communities by providing opportunities for adult relationships to flourish across ethnic and socioeconomic groups. In the process, these programmes support the acquisition of social capital among members of different groups.<sup>15</sup> By providing learning and skill-development opportunities for previously marginalized and excluded groups, ECD programmes can promote the creation of more inclusive, just societies, where everyone: (1) believes that they have an important stake in shaping the

development of the next generations, and (2) works cohesively toward achieving this goal.<sup>9</sup>

Both in the short and long term, the confluence of these three theories of change in early childhood can mitigate different forms of violence. In Table 1, we demonstrate how ECD holds the potential to address different forms of violence in education. As articulated in the next section, this framework is based on the premise that many pro-social behaviours—those meant to help, or at least not harm, another person or group—begin developing in the early years.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the foundations for peace building are laid in early childhood.

*When caregivers feel more connected to, responsible for, and invested in the development of their young children, they are less likely to channel their energy into socially destabilizing activities.*

Table 1. Education & ECD’s Role in Addressing Different Forms of Violence<sup>16</sup>

Violence Type	Examples of Violence Type	Ways in which ECD Can Address the Violence Type
<b>Direct Violence</b> (“deliberate injury to the integrity of human life”)	Effects of conflicts, weapons and violence in schools, corporal punishment, sexual abuse, harsh parenting	Developing pro-social behaviours to not harm others; developing empathy; perspective taking and regulating emotions to prevent impulsive actions
<b>Indirect Violence</b> (“indirect violation of the right to survival”)	Illiteracy, inequality of access to education and opportunities, insufficient educational infrastructure	Developing early learning opportunities and social skills as a foundation for school readiness and for diminishing inequalities in learning opportunities and future income-earning capacity; addressing social and economic disparities through opportunities for early learning to reduce structural violence
<b>Repressive Violence</b> (“deprivation of fundamental political rights”)	Absence of democracy and co-determination opportunities in schools	Understanding and applying rules; taking turns; participating in activities that develop skills for engagement with society
<b>Alienating Violence</b> (“deprivation of higher rights”)	Culturally biased curricula (dominance culture); suppression of subjects, views, and languages of ethnic minorities	Developing a positive self-identity; recognizing individual and group differences and commonalities; promoting culturally diverse parenting and caregiving programmes that bring together families and communities



Children attend an early-childhood programme at Codé, a UNICEF-supported school in Lacustre Village in southern Benin. The tables and chairs were supplied by UNICEF.

## II. Two Suggested Approaches to Peace Building in the Early Years

In understanding approaches to peace building in the early years, it is important to always remember that early human development cannot be isolated from the context in which it occurs. From an ecological perspective, a host of factors influence early human development, from the most proximal (e.g., family) to the most distal (e.g., national and international policies) contexts. For example, children in families where domestic partner abuse is prevalent, or in communities with the presence gang violence, are more likely to internalize violence as a norm and a means to address conflict and differences in power. On the other hand, when countries' social budgets are not child-friendly, or when their policies do not officially recognize the rights of vulnerable and minority populations, the results for communities, caregivers and families (as well as for young

children themselves) can hinder development in the early years. Below, we discuss two suggested approaches to peace building during this critical stage of life.

### 1. A Focus on the Whole Child

ECD is characterized by rapid developments in: physical health and motor development, cognitive skills, language and literacy abilities, social and emotional competence, and a sense of identity and belonging. These developmental domains are highly inter-related, making the ECD process truly integrative. Given this, peace-building interventions in early childhood must also be integrative, building on the inherent synergy among the developmental domains. In the subsequent paragraphs, we discuss how cognitive, social and emotional development can play a key role in promoting peace-building skills in young children.

The development of executive functioning (EF) is one aspect of cognitive development that is instrumental for peace building. EF is akin to an “air-traffic control” mechanism<sup>17</sup> in the brain, allowing individuals to focus; ignore distractions; remember, store and draw from existing information; interpret and contextualize new pieces of information; plan and revise actions based on the situation; and inhibit impulsive behaviours.<sup>18</sup> The first dimension of EF pertains to children’s ability to hold and use information, while the second dimension pertains to children’s capacity to suppress impulsive, irrational responses and, instead, rely on the information they are holding to determine an appropriate response.<sup>19,20</sup> The third dimension of EF is associated with children’s ability to adapt and apply different rules based on situation and setting.<sup>18</sup> The period from age 3 to 5 years is particularly critical in young children’s development of EF.

*In order to stand up against acts of aggression in social interactions, children need to develop empathy.*

In violent contexts, children may be exposed to acts of aggression. Aggressive behaviour can be understood as the deliberate use of force or threats to harm others in social interactions. This can manifest as physical harm or as threats to socially exclude or psychologically hurt others.<sup>21</sup> At 2½ years of age, children are already capable of demonstrating such aggressive tendencies.<sup>22</sup>

In order to stand up against acts of aggression in social interactions, children need to develop empathy—an emotional response that entails experiencing the same, or very close to the same, emotion

that another individual is feeling.<sup>20</sup> Empathy involves the ability to take the perspective of the victim of the aggressive act. Research indicates that children as young as 2 years old can display helping, sharing and caring behaviours towards both strangers and family members.<sup>23</sup> The development of empathy in the early years is critical for peace building, as it is associated with empathic capacity in later life. Young children’s ability to develop empathy provides an important precedent for the development of other peace building skills and competencies, including perspective taking, recognition of instances of discrimination, development of a proclivity toward diversity and inclusivity, and peaceful negotiating. It is important to understand that developing empathy does not occur in isolation. It is also associated with the development of language and literacy skills. In demonstrating concern, children also need to be able to recognize, understand, identify and name the instances that can trigger these emotions.<sup>24</sup>

Moving children from being aggressors to peace builders entails capitalizing on these critical periods when different cognitive, social and emotional capacities develop. For instance, in some contexts, children may be exposed to divisive attitudes around the treatment of other children who are different from them. By capitalizing on the period of rapid cognitive and emotional development, children may learn new rules around inclusivity, acceptance and tolerance. They also need to understand how the victim feels in situations of aggression and exclusion, and that although aggression may bring power and prestige, it is also accompanied by a corresponding loss in esteem and wellbeing in another individual. Sometimes, young children may realize that their existing strategies are ineffective in resolving differences and conflicts. In such situations, they may draw upon their mental flexibility to switch gears and try out a different, yet equally appropriate, set of strategies to find viable solutions.

In short, any approach to peace building in the early

years has to be synergistic. Through the example above, we see how simultaneous development in the cognitive, social and emotional domains serves as a guide in developing a schema for recognizing and addressing issues of systemic discrimination, oppression and injustice. Development across these different domains is inter-dependent; prioritizing one over another will compromise the peace dividends available in the early years.

## 2. Caring for Caregivers

Supportive, nurturing and stimulating environments are also crucial in supporting development.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, peace-building interventions, and policies addressing the needs of young children, must target caregivers. Family, community, and early play and learning centers constitute the child's immediate environment, which facilitates the child's transition from the safeguards and confines of home into the greater society. Family is often the child's window to the world. Children raised in nurturing, responsive and stimulating environments are likely to develop high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as the pro-social behaviours that are key to the success of peace-building interventions.

*Peace-building interventions, and policies addressing the needs of young children, must target caregivers.*

Scientific research has established that early bonding between the caregiver and young child is associated with optimal development of other neurophysiological systems in the body and brain. In adults, these systems are associated with better social function-

ing, including the ability to read others' emotional states accurately and to demonstrate empathic behaviour. It is hypothesized that the early bonds between the caregiver and young child lay the foundation for future interactions not only with those who are similar to the child, but also with those who are considered different.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, one of the associated factors in the development of empathy is the concern for their caregivers that young children experience from a very early age.<sup>24</sup> Adverse environments characterized by violence and neglect from caregivers result in a prolonged stress response, which has a debilitating impact on the young child's overall development.<sup>12</sup>

The relationship between caregivers and young children is bi-directional, such that stimulating and nurturing relationships not only have a positive impact on young children, but also influence caregiver wellbeing. Research shows that "play and touch" interactions and responsive parenting can significantly improve infant and caregiver wellbeing, especially in cases of caregiver depression.<sup>14,18</sup> Improving the psychosocial wellbeing of caregivers can ameliorate the day-to-day stresses and frustrations they might experience in times of conflict. In this manner, interventions targeting caregivers not only contribute to building peaceful and harmonious familial environments, but also spillover into the community. Play circles—as well as other opportunities for caregivers to come together to discuss and resolve the challenges they face in child rearing—also help to forge and sustain relationships across different socio-ethnic and linguistic divides. In addition, when making family- or community-level decisions, caregivers who are psychosocially well are more likely to make choices driven by the best interests of their children, rather than by ideology. This prioritization of the child and the child's future holds great potential for furthering peace-building efforts.



*A man holds his son, outside their makeshift shelter, in the Majo camp for displaced people, in Mogadishu, the capital. UNICEF, in partnership with Somali Community Concern, is supporting two schools, collectively serving over 800 children, in the camp.*

Although families can provide opportunities for responsive, stimulating and nurturing caregiving, they can also perpetuate divisive ideologies. For this reason, it is essential to intervene with whole families. Through exposure to violence and abuse at home, children can accept violence as the norm for resolving conflict in the later years. Parenting programmes that focus on minimizing conflict in families have demonstrated reduction in harsh punishment, verbal and psychological violence in the familial context, and authoritarian styles of parenting, as well

as improvement in open communication between children and caregivers.<sup>15</sup>

In the short term, research has shown that limited opportunities for stimulation and whole child development undermine the foundations of development. In this regard, children may also face developmental delays, such that they are unresponsive to stimuli. In the cases of violence and conflict, a lack of response from the young child can also result in the caregiver neglecting the child, which induces caregiver guilt, stress, and self-isolation (all of which are stressors that may lead to further violence). It is important to note that this relationship is bi-directional. That is, in times of conflict, it is just as likely that caregiver neglect can result from the caregiver's own response to the situation, which might manifest as a limited capacity to care for the child. Either way, the less the child interacts with the caregiver, the less opportunity for the child to develop in an environment of healthy, responsive and responsible relationships.

In the medium term, limited opportunities for stimulation and development thwart opportunities for the development of the skills and competencies that lay the foundation for healthy and positive social behaviours. Minimal opportunities for stimulation and lack of a quality early childhood environment further delay the development of empathy, perspective taking, sharing, and building acceptance for diversity and inclusion. This, in turn, can be associated with negative and unhealthy social behaviours in adult life, which can be drivers of conflict among individuals and groups.

In the long term, limited opportunities for stimulation, development and early learning can perpetuate inequalities and mitigate the positive benefits that accrue from ECD interventions over time. Unequal access to resources can further exacerbate divides, fueling violence and conflict. Increased violence and conflict create limited opportunities for stimulation and child development, and so the cycle continues.



Children play with blocks in a UNICEF child-friendly space in Madagascar. Child-friendly spaces are safe gathering places for children, staffed by trained adults who provide basic care and psychosocial services.

### III. How Can ECD Be Integrated Into Peace-Building Programmes?

Peace-building activities in the early years are not only targeted to times of conflict and violence but are also preventive activities that address the structural drivers that manifest as conflict and violence. In this regard, some practical suggestions for integrating peace-building aspects into ECD programmes, as well as including ECD in peace-building initiatives, are discussed here in brief.

#### 1. Providing opportunities for play and social interaction among young children

The rights to rest, leisure and play<sup>iii</sup> are key rights that enable every young child to fully develop per-

sonality, talents and mental and physical abilities.<sup>iv</sup> The right to play is one of the most underestimated rights, but it holds great potential.

- Through structured and unstructured play with peers, children can creatively explore, learn the “rules of the game,” practice negotiating differences collectively, exercise control, and inhibit violent behaviour.
- Structured and unstructured play with caregivers provides opportunities for caregivers and young children alike to develop attachment, which improves the wellbeing of both parties.
- Research indicates that socially competent children may be better able to identify a victimized peer’s distress and to help and defend others from being victimized in instances of aggression and violence.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>iv</sup> Article 29(1)a of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child

- In this regard, friendships provide a context for children to understand the world in which they live, and may serve as a buffer in times of transition and adjustment.<sup>26</sup> Play among diverse groups of children provides opportunities for friendships to develop and flourish across different socioeconomic, ethnic and linguistic groups.

Thus, children’s social play serves as a “practice ground” for the development of different cognitive, social and emotional skills critical to peace building, and for the creation of bonds across different groups from a young age.

#### 2. Promoting programmes that focus on the creation of a healthy and positive self and group identity that originates from a point of commonality

The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>27</sup> recognizes the right for the very youngest children to preserve their evolving identity. Identity has many dimensions and is often constructed through parents, teachers, peers, communities and existing social norms. Research has already established that children can identify racial cues in adult faces as early as 9 months of age, and can begin forming their own stereotypes and prejudices around the age of 3 to 4 years.<sup>28,29,30</sup>

Unfortunately, identity construction is typically orientated around what distinguishes and differentiates individuals from one another, and less on the unifying commonalities among all people. To address this imbalance, programmes that support the creation of identity among young children should consider:

- Cultural factors that unite people (e.g., what contributes to simultaneous diversity and collectivism within a classroom, family, community or society?);
- The value of recognizing difference when creating a strong self-identity, as long as this is not to the detriment of others;

*The rights to rest, leisure and play are key rights that enable every young child to fully develop personality, talents and mental and physical abilities.*

- Balancing individual and group interests;
- Avoiding approaches, programmes and interventions that serve as tokens (e.g., programmes that are blind to the needs of different races and ethnic groups; programmes that are too short and not targeted strategically; programmes that implicitly discriminate through their pedagogical styles or curricula; or programmes that do not render benefits equitably across vulnerable groups and, in turn, further perpetuate marginalization); and
- The role of the creative arts (e.g., theatre, music, role plays, thoughtful deliberations, etc.) in fostering positive identities.

#### 3. Consciously creating opportunities within home environments, care settings and communities for reflection, perspective taking and critical thinking (both for young children and caregivers)

Teaching children to address conflict non-violently also means teaching children to deliberately suppress responses that are violent or aggressive. In this regard, it becomes important to address the ways through which the suppression of violent and aggressive responses may be internalized and become part of a natural repertoire of behaviours when a child is faced with new, unfamiliar and potentially threatening situations.

<sup>iii</sup> Article 31 of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child

Research indicates that when reflection is interspersed between a stimulus and a response, it brings about a distance from the immediacy of the situation. This separation facilitates the consideration of different perspectives.<sup>31</sup> This has been tried and tested in different contexts. For example:

- The Media Initiative for Children in Northern Ireland explores different forms of oppression and

discrimination through television advertisements that target young children, as well as through the use of persona dolls in early care settings and pre-schools to help children reflect on the feelings of victims of oppression; and

- The Isaan Bright Children Programme in Thailand draws on the principles of Buddhism and uses

parables, fables and experiential learning activities to help children understand cause and effect and the consequences of their decisions.

Drawing from the local cultural and from spiritual beliefs and traditions to facilitate time to reflect, identify and address biases; deliberate and discuss multiple perspectives; and develop empathy can be

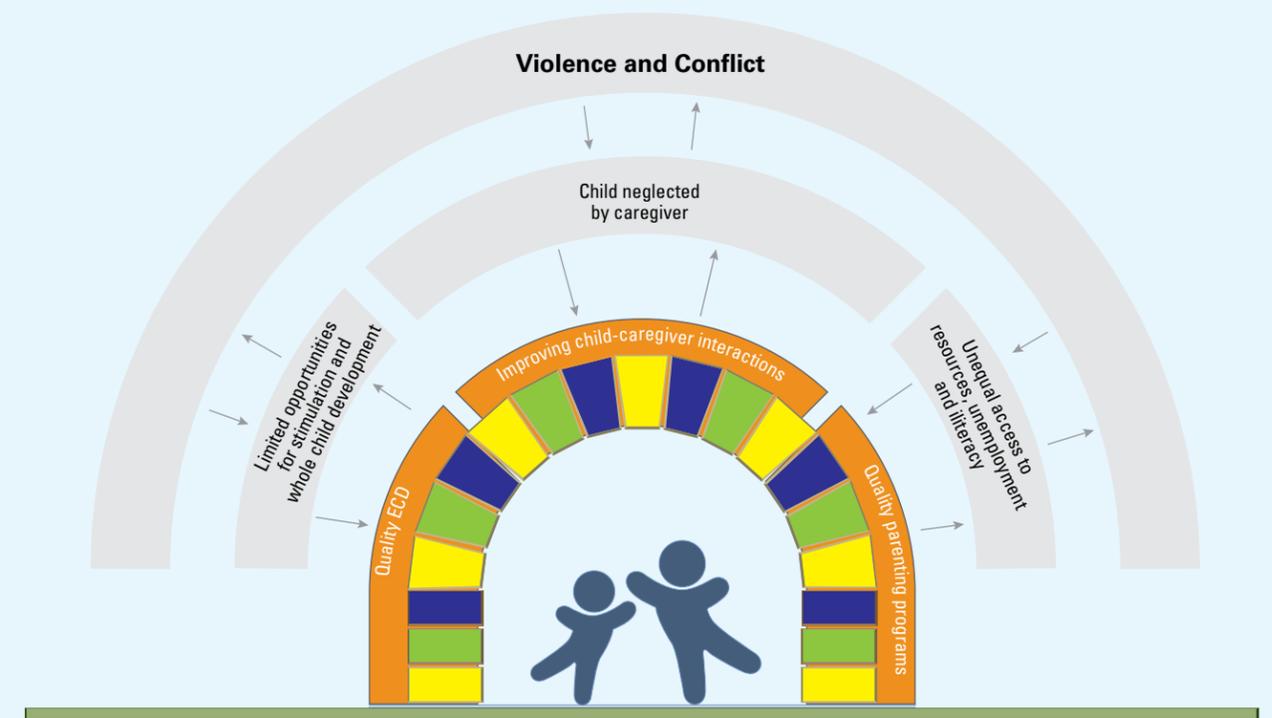
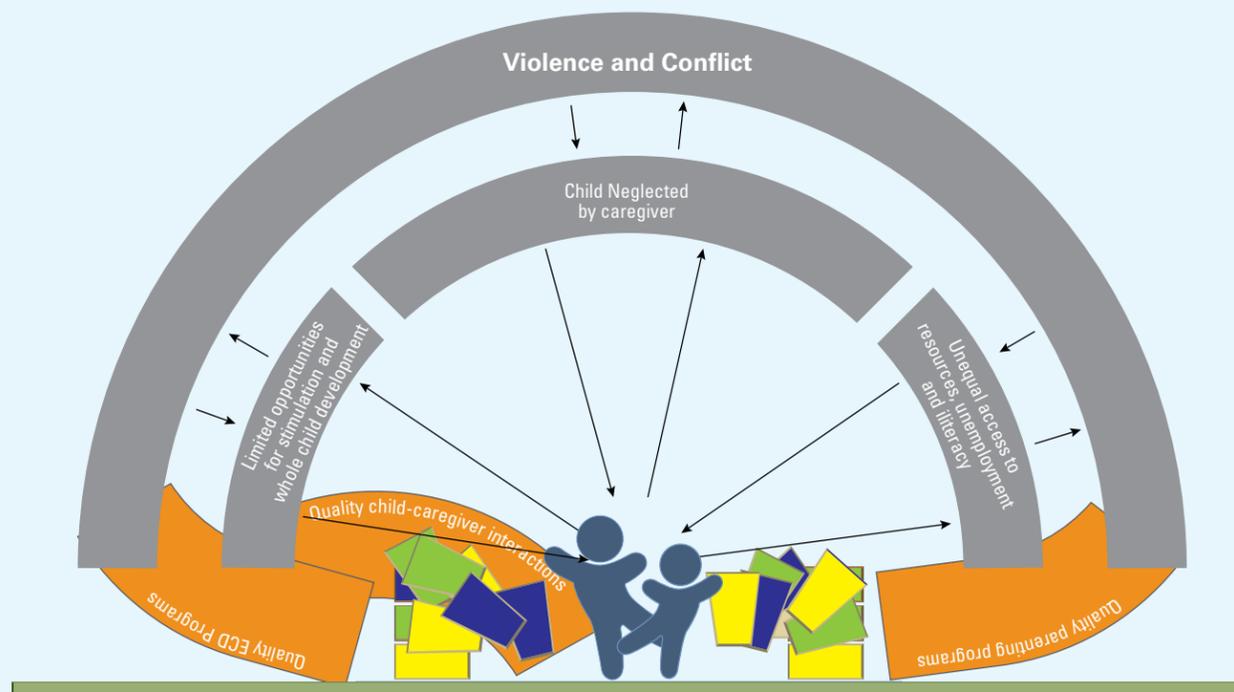
an important nuance of peace building in the early years that should not go unaddressed.

#### 4. Leveraging the role of the media and technology in young children's lives

The media plays an important role in the lives of young children and their caregivers. Through its

Figure 1. Pathways of Peace: ECD As an Agent for Change

Social	Cognitive	Emotional
Prevention of aggressive and violent behaviors	Executive functioning	Empathy and connection
Positive social relationships	Perspective-taking	Hope and optimism





One-year-old Luis plays with the braids of an elderly woman, Sara Pajuelo, in a field in Llacuash, a farming community in the district of Huallanca, Peru.

programmes and content, it communicates overt and covert messages, some of which may further perpetuate divisive attitudes as well as discriminatory and oppressive practices. At the same time, it holds a transformative potential to reach many different groups at once to communicate messages and strategies that promote peace building. Given the widespread access to technologies and the large amounts of time children spend in the virtual world, technology further holds potential such messages and strategies in way that is developmentally appropriate for young children. In considering working with media houses to develop media content around peace building for young children, some factors to consider are:

- What is the level of television coverage within the region or demographic of interest? Who has access to television and who does not? What might be other entry points to ensure that messaging reaches even those who do not view television or have access to it on a daily basis (e.g., early care

settings, preschool classrooms, etc.)?

- What are the existing biases of current media houses? How independent or politically motivated are they?
- Is there a hidden curriculum or an implicit or explicit discriminatory bias within media messaging targeting young children? Who does this messaging victimize or alienate? How do children in victimized and alienated communities respond to these messages? What might be possible ways to use the media to tell the story of the “other” and to communicate to a larger audience in non-discriminatory ways by sharing both sides of a story?
- What are the possibilities for engagement? Targeted children’s programming (e.g., Sesame Street programmes in Israel/Palestine that reach children ages 4 to 7, addressing self-esteem and providing positive role models for young children, especially males<sup>32</sup>)? Advertisements and spots during

primetime television that target young children (e.g., the Media Initiative for Young Children) that align with curricula for preschools and community-based care centres?<sup>33</sup>

- Are there other corporations and institutions that would be willing to fund air time on television?
- How can messaging target young children and their caregivers in the home and the extended community? What forms might this take, such that the messaging is culturally relevant and not controversial?
- What are the prime times for television viewing within the region or demographic of interest, especially among young children?

### 5. Targeting parenting programmes to increase their coverage and reach marginalized populations

Parenting programmes need to be designed based on the needs of local society as well as through an informed needs assessment of the most marginalized communities. Parents who were once associated with armed fighting groups or served as combatants can find themselves marginalized and discriminated against by others within mainstream society. Stigmatized groups tend to live on the margins of society and, as a result, mainstream social protection mechanisms and the benefits of parenting programmes may not reach them.

In addition, parents who were exposed to violence, stress and trauma in their youth may find themselves trapped in patterns of violence and will consequently adopt authoritarian parenting styles. In the absence of exposure to healthy, responsive and nurturing environments, they may not fully understand the impact this has on their young children’s development.

*The media holds a transformative potential to reach many different groups at once to communicate messages and strategies that promote peace building.*

Including marginalized groups in ECD interventions (e.g., by ensuring diverse, multi-ethnic enrolment in ECD centres and parent groups) makes ECD programmes strong entry points for the promotion of social cohesion. It is critical to find an approach for promoting the participation of marginalized groups without inadvertently reinforcing existing stigma. Research also indicates that children who physically or psychologically bring harm to others in school are the children more likely to be identified as insecurely attached at 12 to 18 months of age.<sup>25</sup> In addition, antisocial behaviours toward siblings, including internalizing and externalizing behaviour traits, predicts of future instances of aggression.<sup>21</sup> Any approach toward peace building in the early years should adopt a family-based approach, without which attempts to reduce violence within families and communities will be unsustainable.

All ECD and peace-building programmes should be based on a conflict-sensitive situation analysis.<sup>v</sup> It is critical to fully understand the local context to ensure that programmes mitigate the identified drivers of potential conflict. The Appendix contains various outputs and indicative activities that can be used in the development of peace-building programmes in the early years.

v See INEE’s guide on conflict-sensitive situation analyses, and guide to conflict analyses: <http://www.ineesite.org/en/resources/inee-guidance-note-on-conflict-sensitive-education>.

## Appendix: Outcomes and Activities for ECD & Peace-Building Programmes

Table A1 shows outputs and activities for peace building in the early years. Based on the education and peace-building proposal for the government of Netherlands, as developed by UNICEF's Education Section, and on the most recent INEE Guidance Notes on Conflict Sensitive Education,<sup>34</sup> this compendium has been adapted specifically for ECD.

Table A1. Suggested Outcomes for ECD & Peace-Building Programmes

Outcome: Increased capacity of children, parents, teachers and community members to prevent, reduce and cope with conflict and promote peace.	
Outputs	Indicative Activities
<p><b>1.1</b> Explicit recognition of the importance of peace building in the early years and the importance of early years in bolstering peace building efforts in policy documents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A robust and comprehensive situation analysis that is grounded in national ownership and jointly and collaboratively undertaken with the relevant stakeholders and government departments</li> <li>• Development of an Education Sector Plan that recognizes the importance of peace building in the early years</li> <li>• Advocacy within countries to view preschools and early learning centres as zones of peace that are free of any occupation by the military or non-state actors</li> <li>• Increased capacity building on monitoring and reporting of attacks on schools including preschools and early learning centres</li> <li>• Sector plans that account for the needs of young children, and livelihood generation and support strategies that recognize the diverse needs of caregivers and families</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.2</b> Increased number of young children, parents, caregivers, preschool teachers and community members trained in themes of peaceful conflict resolution, tolerance and social cohesion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for the formation and strengthening of social networks through ECD specific activities – play circles, mother feeding centres and child friendly spaces for young children, etc.</li> <li>• Integration of a specific focus on peace and tolerance in the above settings, and deliberate and strategic attempts to bring together members across different socio-ethnic backgrounds</li> <li>• Training of parents, caregivers, preschool teachers and community members on themes of peaceful conflict resolution, empathy, acceptance and social cohesion</li> <li>• Formation, support and capacity building of parent-teacher and caregiver associations that meet regularly to ensure pro-social, positive messages are consistent across different environments in which the young child develops</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.3</b> Increased number of young children and their parents accessing psychosocial support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training of preschool teachers, parents, caregivers and community members on themes of psychosocial support</li> <li>• Establishment of referral networks for traumatized young children and their parents</li> <li>• Initiation of psychosocial support programmes at the preschool and community levels that are accessible without any discrimination and stigma to all young children, parents, preschool teachers and community-based caregivers</li> </ul>

Outcome: Increased capacity of children, parents, teachers and community members to prevent, reduce and cope with conflict and promote peace.	
Outputs	Indicative Activities
<p><b>1.4</b> Increased number of preschool teachers and community-based caregivers trained in equitable education and peaceful classroom management</p>	<p><b>Recruitment &amp; Selection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear and appropriate job descriptions and transparent selection guidelines are developed for community-based caregivers, teachers in preschools and informal early learning centres; information about openings is widely and equally available to members of different socio-ethnic groups</li> <li>• As feasible, early learning settings (preschools, community-based care centres, etc.) have equitable male and female staff ratios, as well as equitable and diverse representation across different socio-ethnic groups</li> </ul> <p><b>Training &amp; Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and support opportunities available equitably for all preschool teachers and community-based caregivers without discrimination against any group</li> <li>• Training of caregivers and preschool teachers on gender responsive equitable education that recognize diversity and prevents discrimination and promotes mutual respect for all learners, and on peaceful classroom management (e.g., avoiding the use of corporal punishment, modeling non-violent and participatory ways to address conflict and differences of opinion)</li> <li>• Training programmes to support professional peer support structures amongst caregivers to come together and build a community, offer support, share challenges and good practices and reduce psycho-social stress</li> <li>• Training and support for community-based caregivers, preschool teachers and parents to understand conflict dynamics, their own biases and how these biases might influence day-to-day behaviour and interactions with their own children</li> <li>• Availability of professional development opportunities that contribute to the motivation and skills of caregivers and preschool teachers around peace building in early care settings</li> </ul> <p><b>Compensation &amp; Conditions of Work</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair and non-discriminatory compensation and conditions of work that are not discriminatory between different regions or groups</li> </ul>

**Outcome: Increased capacity of children, parents, teachers and community members to prevent, reduce and cope with conflict and promote peace.**

Outputs	Indicative Activities
<p><b>1.5</b> Increased number of parenting programmes offered to parents of different backgrounds (e.g., socio-ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and supporting for parents to model non-violent ways of addressing conflict and differences of opinion within the household (e.g., using non-violent behaviour, discussing why a behaviour is undesirable instead of negative sanctions on young children)</li> <li>• Training of parents to provide caring, nurturing, responsive and stimulating environments for young children that are based on the equitable and fair treatment to all children and siblings in the household and avoiding discriminatory behaviour based on gender, age, disability status, physical appearances, intellectual aptitude, etc.</li> <li>• Training and support for parents to understand conflict dynamics, their own biases and how these biases might influence day-to-day behaviour and interactions with their own children</li> <li>• Parenting support specifically for vulnerable or marginalized parents (e.g., single mothers, ex-combatants, etc.) with the goal of socializing young children towards peaceful attitudes and behaviors</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.6</b> Increased number of children participating in peace education programming that promotes social cohesion and gender equality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of a peace education curriculum and supplementary learning materials, which target young children, their parents and communities through ICTs, media, story books, story telling and play based activities that are age and developmentally appropriate for young children</li> <li>• Language policy in early learning settings informed by the needs of diverse learners, possibly using mother-tongue instruction for early grades</li> <li>• Story books and textbooks for young children in preschools cleaned of biased materials and sensitive to the history, culture and language traditions of learners</li> <li>• Groups reviewing textbooks and storybooks for young children representative of different groups, including those that are marginalized</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.7</b> Early childhood environments are safe spaces in which young children can thrive and develop, even amidst and post-conflict</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early learning centres, preschools and community-based care centres made safe and accessible for all groups, including girls and children belonging to other minority groups</li> <li>• Clear codes of conduct to which caregivers in early childcare centres and preschools adhere</li> <li>• Measures to address sexual and gender-based violence, and any other forms of violence along socio-ethnic and linguistic lines</li> <li>• Repeated communication with caregivers, families and parents that discourages harsh, authoritarian and negligent caregiving and, in turn, stresses the importance of responsive and nurturing caregiving</li> <li>• Repeated communication with caregivers, families and parents that discourages harsh, authoritarian and negligent caregiving and, in turn, stresses the importance of responsive and nurturing caregiving</li> </ul>

References:

(Endnotes)

- 1 Institute for Economics and Peace (2012). Global Peace Index Findings. Retrieved from <http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/>
- 2 UNESCO (2011). EFA Global monitoring report –The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/reports/2011-conflict/>
- 3 UNHCR (2011). Statistical Yearbook 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/516282cf5.html>
- 4 Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 3, 167-191.
- 5 World Bank (2011). World development report – Conflict, security and development. Retrieved from <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/EXTWDRS/0,,contentMDK:23252415~pagePK:478093~piPK:477627~theSitePK:477624,00.html>
- 6 Human security report project (2012). Human security report. Retrieved from <http://www.hsrgrgroup.org/human-security-reports/2012/overview.aspx>
- 7 Galtung, J. (1990). 'Cultural Violence'. *Journal of Peace Research*. 27 (3). p. 171
- 8 UNICEF (2010). Integrated quality framework for early childhood development in emergencies. Unpublished.
- 9 ACEV – Mother Child Education Foundation (2008). Building a generation of reconciliation: The role of early childhood development in peace building.
- 10 Britto, P.R., Yoshikawa, H. & Boller, K. (2011). Quality of Early Childhood Development Programs in Global Contexts. Rationale for investment, conceptual framework and implications for equity. Retrieved from [http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/pdfs/earlychildhood/ECD\\_Global.pdf](http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/pdfs/earlychildhood/ECD_Global.pdf)
- 11 Connolly, P. & Hayden, J. (2007) From conflict to peace building – the power of early childhood initiatives – lessons from around the world. Redmond, WA: World Forum Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.paulconnolly.net/publications/>
- 12 The Science of Early Childhood Development. (2007) National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. <http://www.developingchild.net>
- 13 National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2010). *Persistent Fear and Anxiety Can Affect Young Children's Learning and Development: Working Paper No. 9*. Retrieved from [www.developingchild.harvard.edu\\_](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu_)
- 14 UNICEF & WHO (n.d.) Guidance note for integrating ECD activities into nutrition programs in emergencies
- 15 Yale University and ACEV partnership (2012). Ecology of peace: formative childhoods and peace building. A conceptual framework.
- 16 Adapted from Salmi (2000) in Novelli, M. & Lopes Cardozo, M.T.A. (2008) Conflict, education and the global south: new critical directions. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 28(4), 473-488
- 17 [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/reports\\_and\\_working\\_papers/working\\_papers/wp11/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/reports_and_working_papers/working_papers/wp11/)
- 18 Center on the Developing Child (2012). Building the brain's "Air Traffic Control" System: How early experiences shape the development of executive function. *Working Paper 11*. Harvard University. Retrieved from [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/resources/reports\\_and\\_working\\_papers/working\\_papers/wp11/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/resources/reports_and_working_papers/working_papers/wp11/)
- 19 Grining, C.P. (2007). Effortful control among low-income preschoolers in three cities: stability, change and individual differences. *Developmental Psychology*, 43 (1), 208-221
- 20 Hinant, J. B. & O'Brien, M. (2007). Cognitive and emotional control and perspective taking and their relations to empathy in 5-year old children. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 168 (3) 301-322
- 21 Vlachou, M., Andreou, E., Botsoglou, K. & Didaskalou, E. (2011). Bully/Victim problems among preschool children: a review of current research evidence. *Educational Psychology Review*, 23, 329-358
- 22 Crick, N.R., Ostrov, J.M., Burr, J.E., Cullerton-Sen, C., Jansen-Yeh, E. & Ralston, P. (2006). A longitudinal study of relational and physical aggression in preschool. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 27, 254-268
- 23 Knafo, A., Zahn-Waxler, C., Davidov, M., Van-Hulle, C., Robinson, J.L. & Rhee, S.H. (2009). Empathy in early childhood: genetic, environmental and affective contributions. In *Values, Empathy and Fairness across social borders*, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, Vol. 1167 (10), p. 103- 114
- 24 Moreno, A.J., Klute, M.M. & Robinson, J.L. Relational and individual resources as predictors of empathy in early childhood. *Social Development*, 17 (3), 613-637

- 25 Monks, C.P., Smith, P.K. & Swettenham, J. (2005). Psychological correlates of peer victimisation in preschool: social cognitive skills, executive function and attachment profiles. *Aggressive Behavior*, 31, 571-588
- 26 Brooker, E. & Woodhead, M. (2008). Developing Positive Identities: Diversity & Young children. *Early Childhood in Focus* 3. Retrieved from [www.bernardvanleer.org](http://www.bernardvanleer.org)
- 27 UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38f0.html> [accessed 17 September 2013]
- 28 Bar-Tal, D. (1996). Development of social categories and stereotypes in early childhood: the case of "the Arab" concept formation, stereotype and attitudes by Jewish children in Israel. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 20 (3), 341-370
- 29 MacNaughton, G. (2006). Working papers in early childhood development. Respect for diversity: an international overview. Bernard van Leer Foundation. Retrieved from [www.bernardvanleer.org](http://www.bernardvanleer.org)
- 30 Connolly, P. (2011) Using survey data to explore preschool children's ethnic awareness and attitudes, *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 9(2), 175-187
- 31 Prencipe, A. & Zelazo, P.D. (2005). Development of affective decision making for self and other. *Psychological Science*, 16 (7), 501-505
- 32 Sesame Workshop – what we do? Retrieved from <http://www.sesameworkshop.org/what-we-do/our-initiatives/a-new-paradigm-for-palestine-48-detail.html>
- 33 Early Years – Media Initiative for Young Children. Retrieved from <http://www.early-years.org/mifc/>
- 34 INEE (2012). INEE guidance note on conflict sensitive education. Retrieved from <http://www.ineesite.org/en/resources/inee-guidance-note-on-conflict-sensitive-education>